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TWO PLAYS



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TWO DRAMAS

By
HUGH MANN



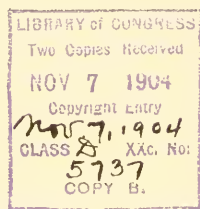
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BOUND

CHARACTERS

CHARLES BURTON — Wealthy lawyer of the firm of Burton & Westbrook in the city of B——.

EDWARD WESTBROOK — Partner and bosom friend of Charles Burton.

ALICE BURTON — Wife of Charles Burton.

HELEN WESTBROOK — Wife of Edward Westbrook.

ETHEL BURTON — Child of ten years, daughter of Charles and Alice Burton.

HOBBS — Serving man in the Burton household.

The action takes place in one day in Charles Burton's house. Act 1st, morning; Act 2d, afternoon; Act 3d, evening.

ACT FIRST

(Morning in early Summer.)

SCENE — *A charming morning-room, with three large French windows in rear, open to the mild air, giving upon a broad piazza, and looking out upon rather extensive grounds for city limits. The room is furnished richly but exquisitely as a lady's boudoir, but used in the first act as a breakfast-room, having a table daintily appointed for three placed near one of the large windows. Doors at either end leading to other parts of house.*

(Curtain rises upon Charles and Alice Burton seated at either end of table, with Ethel between them and facing the audience. They have just finished breakfast. A man-servant [Hobbs] stands with tray in hand back of Charles Burton's chair.)

ALICE BURTON *(to servant)* — Hobbs, you may retire. If Mr. Burton wishes more coffee I will serve him.

(Hobbs places morning paper by Mr. Burton's plate and goes out.)

(Charles Burton has a moody, preoccupied air. He unfolds his paper and retires behind it. Alice Burton's expression shows an exalted air and

mood, but, at the same time, a consciousness of disturbing elements without. She beams upon Ethel the more sweetly, however, that the child's father seems disposed to be ungracious.)

ETHEL — O mamma! How perfectly lovely it is to be old enough to eat at table with you and papa!

ALICE — Yes, darling. We are very pleased that you have learned your table lessons so nicely that we can have you with us.

ETHEL (*insistently to her father*) — Isn't it lovely, papa? Aren't you glad?

CHARLES (*absentmindedly behind his paper*) — Yes, dear, — papa and mamma are very glad to have their little girl at table with them.

ETHEL — I told Fanny Hudson that I was old enough to eat at table with you and papa, and she said, "My papa and mamma do not eat together." Then I said, "Why?" And she said, "They don't live together." (*Charles gives a little start behind his paper, and covers it with a cough.*) Think of that, mamma! What can be the reason? I didn't like to ask Fanny. Oh, I do hope that you and papa will always live together.

ALICE (*with agitation*) — Why, Ethel darling! What makes such thoughts come into your head? Because Fanny Hudson's mamma

and papa do not live together that is no reason why yours should not.

ETHEL — Oh, no, mamma, of course. But it makes Fanny so sad. She lives with her papa and her grandmamma. Her father is quite stern. She used to go to see her beautiful mamma, whom she loves, but now that she is older her papa will not allow her to go at all. So instead of being glad to be growing older, as I am, she is very sorry.

CHARLES (*irritably, lowering his paper, to Alice*) — Why do you allow Ethel to associate with — these people?

ALICE (*with dignity*) — The child goes to Ethel's school.

ETHEL — Yes, papa, and she is my dearest friend. And she's lovely, — *you* would think so too if you knew her. But papa! When shall I be old enough to go into your den?

CHARLES — Not for many a day. — Not for many a day! Why do you wish to go into my den? There is nothing there to interest little girls. (*Trying to lighten his expression somewhat for the child's sake.*)

ALICE — No, no, Ethel, — papa doesn't even like mamma to go into his den.

ETHEL — But, papa, why do you have it? — and so separate from all the rest of the house

that one must go 'way outside to get into it, — and with no windows to look out or see in?

CHARLES (*trying to speak lightly*) — Papa needs a cage to retire into when he wishes to play bear.

ETHEL — What does that mean, mamma?

ALICE — When he doesn't wish to be polite and kind to other people.

ETHEL (*reproachfully*) — O papa! But I might go in when you are not there.

CHARLES — No, no, Ethel! My den is always locked.

ALICE — Yes; and no one else has a pass-key except Hobbs and —

CHARLES — Except Hobbs and (*with a peculiar lowering look at Alice*) Mr. Westbrook.

ETHEL — Uncle Edward!

CHARLES — Ethel, you are getting too old to say Uncle Edward. He is not your uncle, you know. You should say Mr. Westbrook.

ETHEL — Oh, but, papa, I love Uncle Edward too well to call him Mr. Westbrook. And Hobbs! — yes, *he* has a pass-key. But *he* wouldn't let me in for the world. I begged him one whole afternoon.

CHARLES (*sternly*) — Now, now, Ethel; you must never do that again. Hobbs has his orders. Papa has his den for a place in which to be safe

from all intruders. I will show you the inside of it one of these days to convince you that there is nothing there to interest you. But now kiss mamma and me good-bye and run away to prepare for school.

(Ethel kisses both parents brightly and runs away, turning to kiss her hands to them as she goes.)

ALICE *(rather timidly)* — Charles, what do you know of these Hudsons?

CHARLES *(testily)* — What *should* I know of them, more than you do?

ALICE — Only that you have lived here all your life, and so have they, I understand.

CHARLES — Well! What do *you* want to know about them?

ALICE — Nothing, except your reason for not wishing Ethel to associate with them.

CHARLES — I — I — didn't say that — did I? Mrs. Hudson — does not — love her husband — she refuses to live with him — he will not grant her a divorce, — that is all there is to it — *(speaking hesitatingly and confusedly)*.

ALICE — Do you know anything more against her than that?

CHARLES *(fiercely)* — Why do you pester me about the woman? What interest have I in her?

ALICE *(gently)* — I have no wish to pester

you. Are you worried over business affairs? You are not yourself lately.

CHARLES — Yes — No! — I must go to E. for a few days, on some troublesome business. Tell Hobbs to pack my grip; I'll be back from the office in an hour (*looking at his watch*).

MRS. WESTBROOK (*at door, being ushered in by Hobbs — to Alice*) — I asked Hobbs to bring me right in here. Good morning, Charles! (*shaking hands with Mr. Burton*). (*To Alice*) You don't mind, dear?

ALICE — Indeed no, Helen. Come right in. We breakfast here these fine mornings, you see. — Charles, Ethel, and I. I will ring to have the table removed. Sit down. Will you take off your hat?

CHARLES — Well, I must be off. (*To Mrs. Burton*) I'll tell Hobbs about the grip myself as I go out. (*To Mrs. Westbrook*) Good-bye, Helen.

HELEN (*seating herself*) — (*To Charles*) Good-bye. (*To Alice*) No, I can't stay, dear. (*Charles goes out.*) I just came over to have a little chat with you. Is anything the matter with Charles? He doesn't look well.

ALICE — He just confessed to me that he is worried over some affairs of business, — but I

am inclined to feel that this is not all that ails him.

HELEN — So Ethel breakfasts with you now. (*With a sigh*) Oh! I wish I had a child. I think Edward would be happier.

ALICE (*with some nervousness of manner*) — Do you think so? Does he seem *unhappy*?

HELEN — Oh, no. Not *unhappy*, — and he is always kindness and consideration itself to me. I sometimes think he tries to make up to me by his tenderness for the dearth of a child. But he does not seem to find as much pleasure in *me*, — in my *society*, — in his *home*, — as he used. Do all husbands become thus — thus disaffected in time? Is this what one should expect?

ALICE — I — I — suppose so. It is my experience; and if we should have a chance to compare notes with other women as intimately as you and I do — we should doubtless find it that of the average wife.

HELEN — Do you suppose it is because our husbands become interested in some other woman?

ALICE (*in confusion*) — Oh, Helen! — I — I — am sure I cannot tell. But (*recovering herself*) if Charles should become interested in some other woman, — I think I should — should — not mind.

HELEN — Not mind, Alice? Why, you surely cannot love Charles as you should if you can say that.

ALICE — I do not know whether I love Charles as I *should*, — but I do know that I can say that of him. And, indeed, I cannot imagine myself loving *any* man in a way that would prevent my saying it of him also, and feeling it.

HELEN — But suppose he should become *more* interested in some other woman than in you?

ALICE — Well, dear, I could not help that, could I? Nor could he!

HELEN — No! — but do you mean to say you would not mind it?

ALICE — No! Not if we were, all three, honest and simple about it, and accepted the truth and acknowledged it to one another.

HELEN — O Alice! How can you say such things?

ALICE — Helen, if a man were my soul-mate he *could* not become more interested in some other woman than in me, — and if he were not my soul-mate I should *wish* him to be most interested in his *own* soul-mate, whoever she might be, — shouldn't I? And even if he *were* my soul-mate I should wish him to be interested in all other women who attracted him, — to whatever degree he could.

HELEN — What an original you have always been, Alice! I don't think I quite get through my head what you are saying. But how is one to know one's soul-mate?

ALICE — Oh, Helen, that is a hard question! It does not seem to be given to many of us to know our soul-mate and to be known of him — in time. We make mistakes, and the world goes on getting more and more tangled up in this regard because our customs and standards — our legal bonds — prevent us from rectifying these mistakes.

HELEN — But surely, Alice, you would not do away with legal bonds as to marriage, for instance?

ALICE — Helen, dear, it is so difficult to speak freely of these things, and it is so useless to say what one *would* do, in a social order where one is perfectly *powerless* to do as one would. But if I could have my way, I would have no legal bond in marriage to begin with.

HELEN — But, Alice! How shocking! Would you have a man and woman just go and live together for a time, and then each go and live with some one else when he or she wished? Why, that would be free love!

ALICE (*wearily*) — Helen, isn't it quite use-

less to say what one *would* have when one *must* have things quite different?

HELEN — Yes, I suppose so. I *would* have a child, for instance, and I *must* be childless. I wonder if I should have had children if I had married some one else. But that is unthinkable! I could never have married any one but Edward.

ALICE — Helen, you are an honest woman, — do you mean to say truthfully that you never loved, — or even thought you loved anyone but Edward?

HELEN — No, Alice, — I think I can truthfully say that I never did. Have you ever loved anyone else but Charles?

ALICE — Oh, yes! I have loved a number of men.

HELEN — But not all of them in the same way?

ALICE — Not to the same degree. No. I have loved only one man supremely, — but — if I understand what you mean by “the same way,” — yes! I think I have loved all of those men in the same way.

HELEN (*catching her breath*) — Well, then, Alice, — have you loved them all at the same *time*, in the same way? Perhaps that is what I mean.

ALICE (*smiling*) — Yes. I think I have loved

several — two or three, at least — at the same time and in the same way. I did not know *all* of the men I have loved — at the same time. Some of them came into my life at different periods, — and went out of it. But, if I had been associated with all of them at any one time, I might have loved them all at once in the same way, — though not, as I said before, to the same degree.

HELEN — Oh, Alice, you are guying me!

ALICE — No, Helen, not in the least. Listen to me, dear. Your mother married twice, — did she not love both of those men in the same way?

HELEN — Why, of course! — but not at the same time. She couldn't have *married* them both at the same time.

ALICE — No! She could not have been *legally* bound to them both at the same time because the social order does not permit this, — and hence you and she think that she could not have *loved* them both at the same time; but, if our laws and standards were different, I hold that she *could* have done so. In a word, that the seeming unreasonableness of such a thing comes from education, and not from nature.

HELEN — O Alice! I cannot understand you at all. Would you be willing that Charles should love half a dozen women?

ALICE (*laughing*) — My being willing or not would have nothing to do with it, — that is, with Charles's ability to love half a dozen women, — but I *should* think it possible and I should certainly be quite willing.

HELEN — That is perhaps not what I mean, then. If you were united to your soul-mate, as you say — would you be willing that *he* should love half a dozen women?

ALICE (*confidently*) — Oh, yes!

HELEN — Well, you simply daze me! But you always were so strong and self-sufficient, — so clever and original, — so equal to any situation. But I — I am so different.

ALICE (*earnestly*) — Helen! How would you feel toward a woman whom Edward loved better than he does you?

HELEN (*with agitation*) — O Alice! I — I — can not tell! Why — why do you ask me?

ALICE (*very tenderly*) — Would you *hate* her, Helen?

HELEN — Hate her? — hate her? Let me think — let me think! No, I do not think I would hate her. I — I do not think I could hate anyone.

ALICE — Could you *love* her, Helen — other things being equal?

HELEN — I — I — have never thought of such

things before, Alice. Why do you ask me such questions?

ALICE — Would you not *wish* to love any one whom Edward loved, Helen?

HELEN — Oh, yes! I should — but how could I — how could I — if he loved her better than me? It's against human nature, Alice.

ALICE — But would you not think that a better and higher human nature that *could* do this? Would you not think it a desideratum to be able to do it?

HELEN — Why, Alice, you speak as if you were pleading some one's cause. Do you *know* any one whom Edward loves — better — than — he — does — me? (*With wide, distressed eyes.*)

ALICE — No! I am not pleading any one's cause, Helen. But do you know any one whom Charles loves better than he does me?

HELEN (*flushing crimson and in great agitation*) — Why, Alice! How can you ask me such a question?

ALICE (*smiling*) — Did you not ask me just such a question? But I see that you *do* know of such a one, and I will not press you farther. But if she be one whom I love, or could love, I should not love her less for knowledge of this fact.

HELEN — But that is because Charles is not your soul-mate, as you say — I suppose.

ALICE (*with an expression of confident assurance*) — If he *be* he *cannot* love any one else better than me, and, if he *be not*, then I wish him, as I said before, to love best his own soul-mate, — so I could love *her* in any case, — do you not see, Helen?

HELEN — It may be, Alice, that *you* could. You have always been different from other people in many ways, — but — I — oh, I could not — I could not.

(*Charles Burton enters suddenly, — his face dark and forbidding. Seeing Helen Westbrook he makes an effort to lighten his expression a little.*)

CHARLES — What, gossiping yet? And you look as serious as if you were discussing the affairs of the nation.

(*Hobbs appears at door with grip, light overcoat, and umbrella.*)

(*To Hobbs*) — Put those things into the auto, Hobbs.

(*To Alice*) — I must get off on the noon train. Can't tell exactly when I will be back. Not for two or three days at any rate. I will write. Good-bye. (*Kisses her on the cheek. Shakes*

hands with Mrs. Westbrook.) Good-bye, Helen!
(*Mrs. Westbrook rises.*)

HELEN (*to Charles*) — May I have a seat in the auto with you? You can let me down at our house on the way to the station.

CHARLES — Certainly! With pleasure!
(*Alice accompanies them to the door.*)

CURTAIN

ACT SECOND

SCENE — *The Same.*

(*Curtain rises upon Mrs. Burton, seated and absorbed in thought. — A knock.*)

HOBBS (*at door — announces*) — Mr. Westbrook to see you, ma'am, on important business.

ALICE — Show him up, Hobbs, — and if any one calls I am not at home.

HOBBS — Yes, ma'am.

ALICE — And, Hobbs, — when Miss Ethel returns from school, ask her to go straight to her room, and wait me there. I will join her as soon as I am disengaged.

HOBBS — Yes, ma'am. (*Goes out.*)

EDWARD WESTBROOK (*entering*) — Alice! My love!

ALICE (*putting herself into his arms*) — Edward, what is it? (*With a concerned look.*)

EDWARD — Beloved, I fear there are breakers ahead for us.

ALICE — What do you mean, dear?

EDWARD — I have reason to believe that Charles has discovered our love for each other, — that he thinks the worst, and that his spirit is bitter and relentless.

ALICE — He has been moody and irritable lately. I feared as much. What evidence have you that he suspects us?

EDWARD — I have every reason to believe that he has gotten hold of my letters to you.

ALICE — Oh, surely *not*, Edward! Charles would not stoop to take my letters.

EDWARD — Where do you keep them?

ALICE — Locked in the little cabinet of my desk there. They are but few. You have not needed to write often.

EDWARD — Look if they are still there, Alice.

ALICE (*taking a tiny key from her watch chain and examining cabinet, turns a white face to Edward*) — They are gone!

EDWARD — I should not be ashamed to have all the world see them, if it comes to that.

ALICE — No, Edward, they are as noble and beautiful as our love has always been.

EDWARD — But Charles is incapable of finding them so, — incapable of believing that we have never broken the letter of our vows, in all these years.

ALICE — I fear you are right, Edward. It would be in vain to try to convince him that we have done no wrong but love each other — and we could not help that.

EDWARD — We have done one wrong, dear Alice. At least we have made one mistake. We should have openly acknowledged our love as

soon as we knew it to be inevitable, — and have faced the consequences.

ALICE — But, O Edward! The consequences, — Helen's sorrow! — My little Ethel!

EDWARD — Yes, darling. I have hoped against hope that a way would open by means of which these two so dear to us might have been spared — I had hoped to win Helen's mind through her loving heart to the reasonableness of my loving you supremely — but I have had no hope with regard to Charles — and I wanted to spare him, too, — all I could — nevertheless I should have faced the truth and acted upon it.

ALICE — And this you would have done with true manly courage if I had not constantly besought you to wait a little longer.

EDWARD — Do not reproach yourself, my love. You have acted for the best. You love Charles still?

ALICE — Yes, Edward, — even though I love you supremely, — you understand this, — even though I know that he loves another woman better than he does me.

EDWARD (*in surprise*) — You know this?

ALICE — The fact. I do not know who she is. Do you?

EDWARD — Yes! All the world has known but you, dear. She is Mrs. Hudson.

ALICE — Something occurred this morning to make me think it might be she.

EDWARD — She came to Charles to engage him to secure her a divorce from her husband. They — she and Charles — fell instantly in love with each other. I never saw love more intense, more irresistible, — and so utterly unresisted.

ALICE — And would Charles resent my loving you, — when this is the case with him?

EDWARD — Yes, my love. Charles is controlled by all the unreasoning standards of convention. And, in spite of his own life, he would visit upon us all the bitterness of the vengeance of a dishonored husband.

ALICE — Then what are we to do, dear?

EDWARD — We can not kill our love!

ALICE — No, Edward. We cannot kill our love.

EDWARD — We are one from the beginning of all things, — from the primordial atoms.

ALICE — Yes, Edward.

EDWARD — And what God hath thus joined together *nothing* can put asunder.

ALICE — Nothing, Edward. Think of the presumption of fancying that man can join by church or law as God joins.

EDWARD — You have never felt that you were thus joined to Charles?

ALICE — Never! I have always told him so. I have said to him from the first, "I love you well enough to live with you, — but I do not bind myself to you forever, I do not feel that you are my soul-mate." But he has always laughed at me for what he calls my nonsense in this regard — as not knowing my own heart, etc. But he has always been proud of me as his wife, and has never seemed to feel any lack in me until lately, — has always been kind and tender until now.

EDWARD — And you would have wished that things might go on always just as they have been but for this change in him?

ALICE — No, Edward. I have felt for some time that I could not much longer endure this bondage that keeps me from being free to love you to the full, — free to have you love me as you will.

EDWARD — But if Charles should give you this freedom, and be willing that you should continue to live with him just as you have done, would you be content?

ALICE — I think so, Edward — but I do not quite know. Would *you* be content under such conditions?

EDWARD — Content? — perhaps! — because I could thus realize my supreme love for you and keep dear Helen's heart in peace. But we can no longer think of this. We must take decisive steps now.

ALICE — What must these steps be?

EDWARD — We must go away together. To Canada perhaps — and live there — until Charles shall throw you over for desertion.

ALICE — And leave Ethel?

EDWARD — And Helen. Yes, dear. We should be obliged in any case to do this.

ALICE — O my little Ethel! What will you do without your mother? And yet if she is to lead a conventional life — perhaps it is best that I should leave her, — for I should bring her up more than ever now to hate these bonds that bind her mother. But forgive me, dear, I forget that Helen is *your* little Ethel.

EDWARD — Yes, Alice, — Helen is my little Ethel, and will be even more helpless through my defection than Ethel through yours, — because the mould of Helen's life is cast, — while Ethel's is still plastic.

ALICE — But, Edward, are your circumstances such that you can go away thus, and still leave Helen provided for? My fortune, you know, is entailed to Ethel, — though I have a large in-

come while I live, if Charles would be willing to give it to me.

EDWARD — Yes, love. I have had all in readiness for many a day for this exigency — which I knew must arrive. We can do without your income. And now, my soul-mate, — can you bring yourself to go with me — at once — before Charles returns?

ALICE — O Edward! — Edward — I must have time to think — to prepare my mind — to arrange for Ethel. O God! — why do we human beings make life so hard for one another?

EDWARD — We must decide today, my love. Charles may return tomorrow. If all be as I fear, — I would not have you face him.

ALICE — I should not fear to face him, — and I know that you would not, — only to do so would be of no avail. We must go in any event, and we might as well spare ourselves and him the encounter.

EDWARD — Then I shall make all preparations for our departure. When?

ALICE — Come to me this evening after Ethel is in bed. I shall then be able to give you my definite answer, — I shall then be able to tell you when — when I can depart. O Edward! — Edward! (*throwing herself upon his bosom*).

EDWARD (*soothing her with tender caresses*)

— Yes, love. Or perhaps this would be better: I shall wait you in the den. Come to me when you have bidden Ethel good-night —

ALICE (*sobbing*) — For the last time —

EDWARD — And we will make our plans. But let us question each other's heart solemnly. You are as confident as I am that we are soul-mates?

ALICE — Yes, Edward. I know this of inward knowledge.

EDWARD — You feel confident that our allegiance to each other is in obedience to a higher law than that which binds us to other relations?

ALICE — Yes, Edward. This law is my religion.

EDWARD — You have no sense of doing Charles a wrong?

ALICE — No. Charles does not own me. No social standards, no law can justify such bondage as that; I am a free soul, and to live my freedom is my right and part in life.

EDWARD — And Ethel?

ALICE — It is harder to see clear as to her. I love my child, — but — but — I must not hold myself in bondage for this reason. My Ethel will miss me — will be sad, — but she will not *need* me, — and when she comes to the knowledge of the truth that makes free, — she will rejoice that her mother had found it before her.

EDWARD — Oh, Alice, as deep answereth unto deep, so answers your soul to my soul (*they embrace in silence*). And now I must leave you for a while; I will return to the den and await you there (*goes out*).

CURTAIN

ACT THIRD

SCENE — Charles Burton's "Den," a large decagonal room sixty feet in perimeter and twelve feet high. Only five of the sides appear in the scene. There are no windows, the ceiling being a sky-light surrounded by ventilators. Two of the alternate sides run out into small alcoves, of which one is a bathroom the other a gentleman's dressing-room, the appointments of which show through the half-drawn curtains. The three other sides present the flat surface of the wall, and are fitted with bookshelves filled with books, commencing six feet above the floor. The lower half of the side which occupies center rear of stage is filled in with a wide stone fireplace, with mantel-shelf littered with smoking appointments. That of the side which occupies left front of stage has a shallow cabinet containing curios against the wall under the bookshelves. That which occupies right front of stage has the entrance door filling the lower six feet of space. There is a trolley-ladder, arranged to run round the room to give easy access to the books. The floor is of hard wood waxed, with handsome rugs scattered about. A gentleman's business desk and chair stand out on left front. A library table occupies the center. To the right of the fireplace is a huge, richly-appointed divan. Here and there

stands a sleepy-hollow chair. It is evening. The room is lighted by electricity.

(Curtain rises upon Charles Burton seated in desk-chair, his elbows on desk, his head upon his hands, and his face hidden from view. Edward Westbrook lets himself in at the door by a latch-key. He starts painfully on seeing Charles. Charles hearing some one enter turns about, and the two face each other. Charles' countenance is livid and sardonic in expression. Edward's is pale but calm.)

EDWARD (*speaking gently and in surprise*) — You have returned so soon?

CHARLES — I did not go away.

EDWARD — Why did you pretend to go?

CHARLES — That I might have an opportunity to watch the progress of your liason with my wife.

EDWARD — Liason is an unjust word, Charles. Alice and I have never broken the *letter* of our marriage vows.

CHARLES (*furiously*) — Do you expect me to believe any such damned stuff as that?

EDWARD — No. I do not expect you to believe it, — but that does not make it any less true. Alice and I love each other supremely, but this does not prevent her still loving you, or my still loving Helen,

CHARLES (*with a bitter sneer*) — Don't give me any more of that devilish cant!

EDWARD — Charles, listen to me! Alice and I have done wrong only in failing to avow —

CHARLES (*snatching a revolver from its case on the desk and aiming it at Edward's heart*) — This is the way I will listen to you, — damn you! Now answer my questions!

(*Edward springs deftly forward against Charles' right side, presses his pistol arm upward, wrests the revolver from his hands, then retires two or three paces and aims the revolver at his heart.*)

EDWARD (*very quietly*) — Now it is you who will answer my questions. If you move I will shoot you dead.

CHARLES (*who is no coward, faces the revolver calmly and says*) — Shoot!

EDWARD — I wish rather to make terms with you.

CHARLES — State your terms.

EDWARD — I tried to say to you that Alice and I have done no wrong but that of failing to avow our love when we knew it to be inevitable. We have decided to let this wrong cease. We have decided to go away together, — unless — unless you are willing that we shall be free to love each other to the full, — as we will —

CHARLES (*in a voice of thunder*) — What?

EDWARD — Wait! Alice loves me supremely, — but she still loves you as well as ever — well enough to continue to live with you — if you will give her perfect freedom to love me. I love Alice supremely — but I am convinced that Helen would continue to live with me if I told her the truth.

CHARLES — And you expect me to be party to such a filthy mess as that?

EDWARD — Why would this be any more a filthy mess than your present relations with Mrs. Hudson involve?

CHARLES — You damned sneaking hound, — how dare you —

EDWARD — It does not avail to call names. Will you accede to my proposition?

CHARLES — I? — Consent to be a damned cuckold like that? — I'll kill you *all* first.

EDWARD — Is this your final answer?

CHARLES (*more quietly*) — My final answer.

EDWARD — Then I have another proposition to make: Will you grant Alice a divorce without scandal?

CHARLES (*beside himself with rage, seizing the desk-chair, throwing it above his head and starting furiously toward Edward*) — No! Damn you!

EDWARD — Then you must die, Charles!
(*Shoots him through the heart.*)

(*Charles staggers, the chair flying out of his hand and crashing to the floor as he falls backward — dead.*)

(*Edward quietly lays down the revolver and kneels by Charles' side. He examines the body carefully, seeming unable to realize that life has really departed. There is a knock at the door, which Edward in his excitement fails to hear.*)

EDWARD (*opening Charles' clothing*) — How little he bleeds! The hemorrhage must be inward. Poor Charles! (*Lifting the body to the divan and laying it tenderly down.*) Yes, — he is quite, quite dead. Poor Charles! (*Looking down in a sad, dazed way upon the dead man's face.*)

(*There is a second and louder knock at the door.*)

EDWARD (*suddenly remembering, whispers*) — Alice! (*He goes to the door, opens it and draws Alice in by the hand. Her face is blanched and she is trembling horribly.*)

ALICE — Edward — Edward — what is it? — You are alive! — I came as soon as I could. — I heard the pistol shot, as I came — I feared that you, — that you — (*she gasps convulsively*).

EDWARD (*who has stood so as to screen the*

divan from Alice, now moves aside, and, putting his arm tenderly around her, says) — Be calm, my love, — be calm and strong. Charles — lies there, dead.

ALICE — Charles! O God! — Then he did not go away. Dead! — And by his own hand!

EDWARD — No, dearest. He is dead by my hand.

ALICE — O Edward! — You killed him — in self-defense!

EDWARD — No, Alice. I cannot truthfully say in self-defense, though he tried to kill me first, and I was unarmed. I did not need to kill him in self-defense, — I wrested the pistol from his hand and shot him — deliberately.

ALICE — O my God! my God! — Then they will hang you, Edward! Why do you stay here? You must go away quickly — to Canada.

EDWARD — My poor love! I must go — farther than Canada.

ALICE — Then go! — go! — to the ends of the earth, — go quickly. Do not waste a moment! I will follow you — some day.

EDWARD — No, my Alice! Listen to me, my love! We must say farewell for this existence — for — I must go out of it. Look me in the face, my more than life (*putting his arms about her*). You believe that we are one? — That we have

been one from the beginning of all things?— That what God has joined together *nothing* can put asunder? (*Alice has moved her head in solemn assent to each of these questions.*) Well, now my beloved, we must part for a little while, — but soon we shall meet again on a higher plane of being where no false ideals or standards of others can come between us, — where love shall be free — free forevermore!

ALICE (*in an awed voice*) — Yes, Edward, but *now*? — But what will you do *now*?

EDWARD — I will write one line, sign it, and leave it in your hand — stating that it is I who killed Charles, — that you may not be accused. Then I will bid you farewell, my Alice — my love — and go home to Helen. Tomorrow, we — Helen and I — will go out in the auto for our morning spin, — very early. We will go by the high bluff road. At the summit the machine will become unmanageable, — and — we will go to *certain death*.

ALICE — O Edward! — Take me! — take me! How can I live when you — are *all* gone?

EDWARD — No, my Alice. You are strong to live. It may be that you will be able to do something to help free the world — as to *love* — as I had hoped to do. But Helen — would be crushed. She would *choose* to die with me.

But I will not let her know that she is going to her death. It will be better so. As for me, — you know, my darling, what *I* think of death — as only the gateway for all of us to higher, freer life.

(As he says these things Alice seems turned to stone. She watches him thus as he writes a line. Then, as he approaches her, her face lightens with a wonderful look of adoring love.)

EDWARD (*folding her in his arms in unspeakable tenderness*) — Alice, my goddess, — my other part, — my soul-mate, — we are one forever. — You will remember? I shall be nearer to you in the spirit than I have ever been in the body. (*Kissing her slowly and repeatedly. Then, while her eyes follow him in rapt gaze, he goes out.*)

ALICE (*continuing to gaze after him for some seconds, — then, suddenly remembering her anguish, throwing her clasped hands with a tortuous motion of the arms above her head and crying*) — And *I* must live? — How long, O Lord! — how long? (*Falls heavily forward upon the floor.*)

CURTAIN

FREE

CHARACTERS

ERSKINE BARTLETT—Scion of a *Mayflower* New England family; born in California; professor of psychology, holding chair in University of S——, university extension lecturer.

ELGAR STRAUSS — Famous tenor in Herz Grand Opera Co.; American born, but of German ancestry.

EROICA ARDENZA — Famous soprano in Herz Grand Opera Co.; American born, but of noble Italian blood.

AGATHA BARTLETT — Wife of Professor Bartlett.

SARAH CARTER — Widow of reduced fortunes; member of aristocratic southern family; of cosmopolitan social experience; intimate friend, life companion, woman of business to Eroica Ardenza.

MAID TO EROICA ARDENZA —

The action in the first, second, and third acts takes place in the apartments of Eroica Ardenza, in the fourth act in Prof. Bartlett's flat.

ACT FIRST

SCENE — *Handsomely furnished drawing-room in the suite of Eroica Ardenza in the "Roscoe."*

(It is midnight. Curtain rises upon Sarah Carter, in luxurious dressing gown, lying upon a divan, having just awakened from a comfortable nap. She sits up, presses her hands over her eyes, and smooths her exquisitely dressed white hair. A clock with a musical chime strikes twelve.)

SARAH *(rising)* — Eroica should be here. Ah, there she comes! *(Moving to entrance door, which is being opened by a latch-key.)* Well! Here you are! *(As Eroica enters, followed by her maid.)*

(Eroica, mature, superbly handsome, glowing with triumph, flings her arms about Sarah's neck, kisses her on both cheeks, then, throwing back her own head, laughs aloud in an abandon of delight.)

SARAH *(unclasping Eroica's rich evening cloak and handing it to the maid with a sign to withdraw)* — No need to ask if all went well, my song bird? *(The maid goes out.)*

EROICA — No, Sarah dear. It was glorious! I felt inspired; I did not think of how I was singing, — of how I was doing anything, — I just

did it. And I seemed to inspire Elgar, too. He was perfect. And the house was wild. — And the “Liebestodt”! I wonder if anybody ever sang it before with such sensations. I felt as if I were floating through space with the other half of my soul, — and something within me kept saying, “There is *no* death, — nothing but life, — life, — and ever more and more life!” (*She seats herself and gazes rapturously into space.*)

SARAH (*gently, after a pause*) — Are you tired, dear?

EROICA (*brightly*) — Oh, no, no, Sarah dear, I feel as if I had a new lease of life rather. Are you sleepy, you good Sarah? I have so much to say to you, — and as for me, — I feel as if I should never be sleepy again.

SARAH — Oh, no, Eroica, I have just had a fine nap. Talk yourself out, my love; I am all ears and all heart at the same time, as you well know.

EROICA — Well, you dear good Sarah, your Eroica made some daring innovations as to the stage traditions in the interpretation of Isolde. Now you know why I did not want you to be present at the first essay of my ideas. I did not wish you to see me fail — if the innovations did

not take. But they took (*glcefully*), and now you shall hear me for yourself next time.

SARAH — I am not surprised that they took, Eroica. You are not only a gifted artist, but a woman of splendid intellect. Your interpretation must have had a high intellectual as well as artistic quality.

EROICA — Oh, you dear Sarah! Your goose would always be a swan in your eyes, no matter what she did.

SARAH — Go on, and tell me about these innovations.

EROICA — First, then, Sarah, I *was* Isolde, — for the time being. You know I am made so. And with my freedom of speech as to social traditions and standards I was able to be, as that gloriously primitive woman herself must have been, utterly without any maudlin sense of guilt or wrong or injustice to any one in loving Tristan and in giving myself to him. Then I was natural in the dramatic action, that is, simple, not stagey, stamping, strutting, ranting, according to the traditions, — and finally, instead of being ashamed and crushed and hiding my head when we were confronted with King Mark and Tristan's denouncers, I stood up and faced them all with gentle pride, wishing only that Wagner had given me something to sing in which to pour

out my feeling that I was doing *right*, the holiest right of the universe, — and *not* wrong, *not* wrong.

(*Eroica accompanies this recital with most exquisite and charmingly appropriate movement and gesture.*)

SARAH — And do you think that your audience appreciated this, — interpreted it as you meant it?

EROICA — In a measure, yes, — but not, of course as they would have done if Wagner had given me a chance to *sing* such expressions. But to no *man*, not even to Wagner, would it occur to do this. Some great woman composer of the future will do such things.

SARAH — Mayhap yourself!

EROICA — No! This is not my genius. It is my genius to revolutionize interpretation. And I shall do it, — you will see. I prevailed upon dear old Von Hüsen, the conductor, you know, to play for *me*, at least, according to my idea. I convinced him that Wagner, in putting the orchestra under the stage instead of between singer and audience, had given the greatest mark of his genius in opera, and that when the orchestra is not so placed, the orchestral accompaniment of the voice should be subdued suffi-

ciently to give this effect, and to allow the human tones to dominate the waves of sound.

SARAH — O Eroica! Your idea is as great as Wagner's.

EROICA — Perhaps! I am convinced, at least, that the applause I secured was in great part due to this effect, whether the audience realized it or not.

SARAH — And Von Hüsen did that for you — to your satisfaction?

EROICA — Yes. Wasn't it wonderful that he was willing?

SARAH — Doubtless! But I question if there has ever walked the earth a being capable of such empire over men as a great singer, who is at the same time a tactful, charming, beautiful woman.

EROICA (*with exquisitely playful mockery*) — Ah! Sarah! There speak your southern social traditions as to women. Such empire as you allude to may exist, but it is temporary only — the world is fickle.

SARAH — Of course — of course, — in that as in everything else, — but you will grant that such empire is supreme — while it lasts.

EROICA (*after a short silence*) — Well! So much for my *art*, — and now (*with great sweetness of expression*) for my heart. Erskine was in the audience tonight.

SARAH — Professor Bartlett? Does he live here?

EROICA — No! He belongs to the University Extension corps, and makes this his headquarters for the lecture season.

SARAH — Has the time come for you to tell me about this Professor Bartlett, Eroica? You know he is scarcely more than a name to me.

EROICA — I think it has, Sarah, — I think the time has come. Let me see! What do you know?

SARAH — Only that you were in college together. What made you go to college, Eroica?

EROICA — I had brains. And then I wanted to prove to father that *nothing* could stand in the way of my becoming a great singer.

SARAH — Nothing, Eroica! It was ordained. Not even the prospective inheritance of great wealth could hinder you. That was the greatest test of all, I think.

EROICA — No, Sarah! The greatest test of all was having to stand out against the conventional ideal of love.

SARAH — Ah!

EROICA — Yes, Sarah! And thus it was: I had finished three of my four years when Erskine came to the chair of psychology. We loved at once. So rapturously, so perfectly, that

I knew beyond question that this was the love of my life, although (*with a playful smile*) I had loved much and many before, and knew that I should love much and many again.

SARAH — Well!

EROICA — Erskine wanted me to marry him.

SARAH — And you refused?

EROICA — I told him that I had no *need* to marry him.

SARAH — (*catching her breath*) — And he —?

EROICA — Was conventional — and was shocked and crushed.

SARAH — Naturally! — and you?

EROICA — I told him that I would never be *wife* to any man — that I was destined to be a great artist, — that in taking up the vocation of wife I should be doing worse than he would if he should turn his back on his profession and become house-steward to some woman, — that I was responsible to the universe for my artistic faculty, and that I would let nothing stand in the way of my developing it.

SARAH — Wonderful! And then?

EROICA — And then he assured me that he would never ask me to be a wife in that sense — that he would not think of standing in the way of my art —

SARAH — Yes! They *all* say that —

EROICA — But I showed him that it was not what *he* would do or not do that was in question — that the gist of the matter was that *I* as a wife could not be free in *myself* to do the things that I wished to do.

SARAH — And could he see this as you did?

EROICA — Not exactly, perhaps, — not at first, at least. But I was able to realize for him what he could not realize for himself, — although he was older than I. Women — are made like that, I think (*musingly*).

SARAH — Yes! —

EROICA — It was hard, Sarah! — He was glorious! The most naturally, freely, exuberantly virile man I ever saw, — and with an intellect that dominated everything in him but the strain of puritanic inheritance that possessed him at that time.

SARAH — Ah, these strains of inheritance!

EROICA — He was young then — he did not realize that he would rise above that strain — grow out of it. It would not dominate him now. But I — I had no puritanic strain of inheritance (*lifting her head with a rapturous expression*). I have in me the blood of the nobles of Rome, — I have been free since the primordial beginnings.

SARAH — I see, — but Erskine — Professor Bartlett?

EROICA — Erskine loved, or thought he loved, domestic sweetness, — he wanted a *wife*, — he longed for a child.

SARAH — And you did not sympathize with this?

EROICA — I assured him that though I loved him supremely, and would always do so, that I should never give my life to these things — wifehood — motherhood.

SARAH — And you parted?

EROICA — Not until the end of the year, when, just before my departure for Europe, he married my chum — my dearest friend — the sweetest woman soul I ever knew — a woman with the genius of motherhood as strong as my genius for song.

SARAH — O Eroica! And this did not break your heart?

EROICA — On the contrary it gave me joy. I knew that he was capable of loving her as she wished to be loved and of loving me supremely at the same time. And I knew that he was getting what he thought he wanted as the greatest perfection that earth could give.

SARAH — And you have not met since?

EROICA — No, but we have had regular and sweet communication. They have a child — a

little girl of twelve. She is called Eroica — and — and — she is *blind!*

SARAH — Totally blind? — hopelessly blind?

EROICA — Totally — hopelessly blind.

SARAH — Oh, what a tragedy!

EROICA — Perhaps! (*Musing with a sweet and tender expression.*)

SARAH — And have you, in your experience of loving many and much (*laughing in spite of herself*), still held to your supreme love for this man?

EROICA — Yes.

SARAH — And he?

EROICA — When I saw him tonight heaven entered my soul, for I knew that he had held to that same supreme love for me.

SARAH — And how is it about Elgar?

EROICA — I love Elgar — deeply — truly — tenderly — passionately.

SARAH — And you love Erskine in the same way?

EROICA — In the same way, — only more intensely — more supremely.

SARAH — Are you not to Elgar all that a wife *could* be except in *name*, — except in *living* with him?

EROICA — I am not a *wife* to any man — and I will never be (*with lifted head*).

SARAH — What is this feeling you have about wifehood, Eroica? Explain it to me!

EROICA — A wife is a woman who consecrates herself for life — sexually to one man. I will never consecrate myself for life to any person for anything. This is slavery. *I* must be free. I may be seemingly enslaved by circumstances over which I have no control — but this is not really slavery. I will never put myself deliberately into any kind of bondage. This is the only true slavery — that into which one puts oneself.

SARAH — I see! You would not take an oath to love always, for fear you might change in that regard.

EROICA — Oh, no! It is not that. I could take such oath and be sure never to break it, — but I would *give* to no man, or law, power to *compel* me to do *anything*.

SARAH — But, Eroica, every time you enter into a business contract you give some man, some law, power to compel you to do what you contract to do.

EROICA — Ah, but I do not make *life* contracts, I can dissolve such relations at any moment; nor do I consecrate myself to one person in such relation; I am free to enter into similar relations with any number of others. If I could marry

under such conditions, — I should not object to marriage perhaps.

SARAH — But, Eroica, such conditions in marriage are out of all question at present.

EROICA — Yes, except where both man and woman feel as I do. But I am in advance of present development, and I *must be free*.

SARAH — But is not this freedom at the expense of certain joys that marriage might bring? Is not the deprivation of these joys but another form of slavery into which you put yourself?

EROICA — Oh, no, Sarah! I deprive myself of nothing. I love, — I am loved, — I am free to love, — I am free to be loved. This is the perfect freedom, the freedom of the within. There can be no slavery for one who is in this freedom.

SARAH — But, Eroica, how is it with you about children? You love children, — you help them everywhere — have you never wished for a child yourself?

EROICA — Oh, yes. I have wished for a child. But if I should be an *illegitimate* mother (*smiling*), I should put my *child* into bondage with the present social order, and I would no more do that than put myself into bondage.

SARAH — Yes! It is Scylla or Charybdis. I see —

EROICA — But those whom I help — they are as much my children as if I had borne them.

SARAH — But, Eroica, — they have not your personal love and care, such as your own children would have.

EROICA — If I had ever borne a child, — that child should not have had my personal care. This care would have been delegated to hands much better fitted than mine, by individual capacity and trained skill, for such work.

SARAH — But what would your child be without mother-love?

EROICA — Oh, this trite, pitiful ideal of mother-love that holds the world! Are personal ministrations from untrained and unskilled hands the highest manifestations of mother-love? This idea is a relic of primitive times. That mother loves her child best who gives to that child the most perfect environment evolution affords. Children should be cared for by those who have the same passion for that sort of thing (*suddenly becoming sweetly gentle*) that I have for music. This passion is the true mother-love, and not that animal instinct that we hug from prehistoric times. See, Sarah? (*With a gracious smile.*) But come! let us woo Morpheus (*suppressing a yawn*). We shall not need to court him long I fancy. (*They go out together.*)

CURTAIN

ACT SECOND

SCENE — *The same*

(*Curtain rises upon Eroica, in exquisite negligee. There is a knock at the door. The maid enters and announces Mr. Elgar Strauss. — Elgar enters. He is a splendid specimen of Norse virility — lithe, young, beautiful.*)

ELGAR — Eroica! My goddess!

EROICA (*beaming sweetly upon him*) — Elgar, you were a Tristan to my Isolde last night.

ELGAR (*taking both of her hands and lifting them to his lips*) — I could have no higher praise. But it was you who inspired me.

EROICA — Elgar, it was dear of you to adapt yourself so beautifully to my innovations. I could never have succeeded if you had not done that.

ELGAR (*radiant*) — Eroica, you lift me to the seventh heaven.

EROICA — But did you do it, Elgar, because you wished to please me, or because you yourself sympathized with the interpretation?

ELGAR — I — I — scarcely know. There was a mixture of both, perhaps.

EROICA — But you know as Isolde I felt that I was doing right and not wrong, to give myself

to Tristan. And as Eroica, I should feel the same way, in a similar case (*insinuatingly*).

ELGAR — I, too, should feel that you were doing right — in a similar case.

EROICA — You mean in a case where I was married by compulsion to a man I did not love — when I loved another?

ELGAR — Yes.

EROICA — But suppose I were married to a young and beautiful man — like you, Elgar — whom I loved, and I should come to love another man more, — what would you think then, Elgar?

ELGAR (*choosing his words with care*) — I — I — should not think it possible for you to love another man more while you loved one, in the true sense, my Eroica.

EROICA — What do you mean by the true sense, Elgar?

ELGAR (*boldly and passionately*) — The sense in which a *woman* loves a *man*, — with the sex-love.

EROICA — Then you think it is impossible for a *woman* to love more than one man at a time with the sex-love?

ELGAR — I — I — think so. I have always thought so (*excitedly*).

EROICA — That is, Elgar, you have always accepted the traditional idea on the subject, and

never have done any *thinking* on your own account thereupon.

ELGAR (*smiling faintly*) — You corner me, Eroica.

EROICA — Elgar, look me in the face and tell me the honest truth. Have you never loved more than one woman at once, with the sex-love?

ELGAR (*discomfited and confused*) — I — I have not loved another woman to the same degree, while I have passionately loved one.

EROICA — That is not what I asked you, Elgar. Think! Answer me truly.

ELGAR (*flushing, hesitating, — then simply and frankly*) — Why — yes, Eroica, — I seem forced to realize that I have.

EROICA — Then why should it seem impossible to you that a woman should love more than one man so?

ELGAR — O Eroica! It seems horrible to think of. My whole nature revolts at the thought.

EROICA — No, Elgar! Not your nature — your inheritance — your acceptance of traditional standards.

ELGAR — Perhaps! But, O Eroica! How could I endure to think of *you* as loving any other man than *me* with the sex-love?

EROICA (*sweetly and gently as to a child*) — But, Elgar, you *must* endure it, — because I *do*!

You know I told you that I would never be a wife to you, — that I would not consecrate myself sexually to any man.

ELGAR — But, Eroica, — I thought this was because of your art — that you did not wish to have children — that you — that you —

EROICA — No, Elgar! This is *true*, — but it is not the *reason*. I love *another* man sexually, much more *intensely* than I do you, — just at this moment, — while I love you deeply — truly.

ELGAR (*in anguish*) — O Eroica! Eroica! Can this be?

EROICA (*with exquisite gentleness*) — Yes, Elgar. But I do not love you the less for that.

ELGAR — Eroica, you put poison into the cup of our love. I can never have joy in it again!

EROICA — And you are a man who reasons?

ELGAR — Yes, but I am more a man who feels.

EROICA — But, listen, Elgar! What is it you feel? What takes away your joy in our love?

ELGAR (*fiercely*) — The fact that another shares it with me, — has the larger share.

EROICA — O Elgar! I have loved you for your generous and noble soul. Is this the part of such a soul?

ELGAR (*bitterly*) — You outrage nature, Eroica. Never since the world began has man felt other than I do.

EROICA — Ah! did I not tell you, Elgar, that it is tradition, inheritance, and not nature that makes you feel so?

ELGAR — Tradition has become a part of nature, then, Eroica.

EROICA — Perhaps, with some natures, — but is this a reason for permitting it to continue so, as we develop in reason? Is not nature always moving through evolution to a higher and higher plane? Is it worthy of a man of your broad, noble principles of life, to let yourself go on feeling thus?

ELGAR — I begin to believe, Eroica, that a man's feelings are the biggest part of him.

EROICA — And yet — passionate artist as you are, — you are the last man to let your feelings — your primitive emotions — dominate your art — override your intellect, — why should they dominate any other part of your life?

ELGAR — Almost thou persuadest me, Eroica!

EROICA — O Elgar! I would not persuade you. I would have you reason with yourself, and find the truth within you.

ELGAR — My mind is a tempest, Eroica. My reason and my feelings are so intermingled in this matter that I can not separate them, — just yet, — I must have time.

EROICA — Elgar, if you could rise to the noble

height of continuing to joy in my love — although I love another more than I do you, — of continuing to love me although you do not possess me, — then might we go on in blissful association, — continuing to inspire each other to the highest reaches of character as well as of art.

ELGAR — But what if I should fail, Eroica? What if the consciousness that we are not all in all to each other should sometimes break *in* upon me, to break *out* in my life.

EROICA — Then, Elgar, if you are the noble soul I take you to be, you will rejoice that I can not be goaded by that consciousness in you, — that I am free from any responsibility to that consciousness.

ELGAR — But, Eroica! Can anyone be so free as that in the social order?

EROICA — I think so, Elgar (*very sweetly*).

ELGAR — Is such freedom compatible with the love that helps and inspires others?

EROICA — Does my love help and inspire you, Elgar?

ELGAR — You know that it does — you know that it does, Eroica!

EROICA — Would you give it up — such as it is?

ELGAR — No — no — Eroica!

EROICA (*with caressing tenderness*) — Do you

feel that you need to do anything to *bind* that love more closely to you, Elgar?

ELGAR — Oh, no, Eroica!

EROICA — Would you go through the farce of trying to make me responsible to a legal bond, instead of to myself — for that love?

ELGAR — Not — not *now*, Eroica!

EROICA — Do you think that any bond or contract or promise, or any such thing, — could *force* out of me any higher or greater or finer love than I give you now, — any more help or inspiration to your life?

ELGAR — No, Eroica!

EROICA (*with exquisite charm*) — Do you love me still, Elgar?

ELGAR — O Eroica! you know that I cannot help but love you!

EROICA — Then you have your answer, dear Elgar. The love that helps and inspires is compatible with the most perfect freedom from bonds or consecration, or any such thing. I am all the better able to love you that I am free, and you are free to love me all that you are able. See, my beautiful Elgar! My young god! Kiss me, dear! (*Elgar takes her hands in his, places them upon his shoulders, draws her toward him gently, and kisses her on her brow, her eyes, her mouth with grave and tender passion.*)

CURTAIN

ACT THIRD

SCENE — *The same*

(Curtain rises upon Professor Bartlett, standing, one hand upon the back of a chair, his face turned with eager expectancy toward the door through which Eroica is to enter. She enters. They gaze at each other with an expression bordering upon ecstasy. They approach each other slowly.)

ERSKINE — I could kneel to you, Eroica!

EROICA — And I could kneel to you, Erskine.

ERSKINE — The moment I see you again, Eroica, I know that you are all to me that a woman can be to a man.

EROICA — The moment I look into your deep, glorious eyes, Erskine, I know you to be my perfect mate.

ERSKINE *(taking her into his arms)* — And this, after all these years of separation?

EROICA — It was so in the beginning with us, Erskine, and it must continue to be so eternally. *(They sit down.)*

ERSKINE — I have learned much, Eroica, since you told me that you did not need to be my wife — I understand you now.

EROICA — I knew the time must come when you would, Erskine. And yet you love Agatha as you always did?

ERSKINE — I have loved Agatha the more and more sweetly, as I came to understand you.

EROICA — And Agatha?

ERSKINE — *She* understood in the beginning. She has always understood.

EROICA — Dear Agatha! And, O Erskine! what beautiful work you have done for the world in your teaching and writings upon child psychology. If your ideals could be put into application we should soon have a new race — a race of gods! But let us go back to when we parted, Erskine. You were grieved and crushed that I did not marry you?

ERSKINE — Yes, Eroica!

EROICA — Do you wish now that I had done so?

ERSKINE — No, my Eroica! I could not see then, what you saw with prophetic vision — but I know now that your life would have been warped and blighted.

EROICA — Yes, Erskine. And yours would have been unspeakably trammelled for my sake, as well as your own. Although no man in marriage can possibly hamper his true life in the world as a woman can hers, by becoming a wife.

ERSKINE — Yes, Eroica. I see — I see — I have seen it for Agatha.

EROICA — And, Erskine dear, have you been able to realize for yourself that ideal of love embodied in a wife — a child — a home that you felt it so necessary to live for then?

ERSKINE — Dear Agatha has been an angel to me, in all these years —

EROICA — And yet? —

ERSKINE — And yet I know that her individuality has been cramped, — her life narrowed by the faithful holding to this ideal of wifehood, that was hers as well as mine.

EROICA — And your child, Erskine?

ERSKINE (*with the pain of an almost super-human sympathy and tenderness in his face and voice*) — Nothing can take away our joy in our child, Eroica, — but oh, the bitterness of her affliction to both of our hearts!

EROICA — And your home, Erskine?

ERSKINE (*with a smile of mingled pathos and humor*) — We can scarcely be said to have had a home in all these years, Eroica. I have been obliged to be so nomadic, in the pursuit of my studies and in my lecture courses. We have boarded most of the time (*with an expressive grimace and shrug*). And our little Eroica (*with thrilling tenderness*) has spent almost all of her precious little life in an institution, as you know. We owed it to her to give her the best

advantages the world offers to one afflicted as she is, and, thanks to your generous love, we have been enabled to do this, — but it was incompatible, of course, with having her with us — in a home.

EROICA — And the child is a musical genius, Erskine, — with creative faculty?

ERSKINE — Judges tell us so, Eroica.

EROICA — She is my child, Erskine, — mine as well as yours and Agatha's.

ERSKINE (*with passionate fervor*) — She is the world's child.

EROICA — Yes, Erskine, you have put it perfectly. She is the world's child. But until the world is developed to the point of recognizing its children and providing for them with the best it has to give, its parents, its handicapped parents, must do the best *they* can. And I am one of little Eroica's parents, am I not, Erskine? (*With sweetly insinuating grace of manner.*)

ERSKINE — O Eroica! — I sometimes think you are her *only* parent, — you have done almost everything for her.

EROICA — And what joy this has given to me, Erskine. Not that she is the only one. I have many such children. But as you are the dearest soul to me in all the world, Erskine, so your child is the dearest to me of my children.

ERSKINE — And I am still the dearest soul to you in all the world, Eroica? That great world that kneels at your feet!

EROICA — You were from the very first — and you have never ceased to be for one moment in all the time and distance that have separated us.

ERSKINE — And I, through all that time and distance, have only realized more and more fully from day to day the depth, the richness, the inevitableness of my love for you.

EROICA — I knew when I saw you at the opera that this was so. And yet, my Erskine, you realize that I have loved, — that I still love other men?

ERSKINE — In the same way that you love me, Eroica? (*With a quizzical little smile.*)

EROICA — Yes, Erskine — but not to the same degree — you understand, oh, my Erskine? (*Appcalingly.*)

ERSKINE — I understand, Eroica — I understand! — you have no need to explain *anything* — *now!*

EROICA — O Erskine! what unspeakable ecstasy this is! To find that you understand me as I understand myself, — to find that I understand you as you understand yourself — to find that we are more each other than we are ourselves (*with sweet, low, rippling laughter*). What joy it is

to be a woman, Erskine, to feel toward a man as I feel toward you.

ERSKINE (*rising*)—Virility has a new meaning, my Eroica, when a man knows a woman to be his perfect mate, as I know you to be mine.

EROICA (*rising, in rapturous tones*)—All beauty, all joy, all life seem to flow from you to me, Erskine!

ERSKINE—All beauty, all joy, all life seem to flow from you to me, Eroica!

EROICA—We are *one*, Erskine—so that I know not where I begin to be you or you begin to be me.

ERSKINE—We are a sphere of love, Eroica, with all of the universe miniaturized within us.

(*Their arms encircle each other, their lips meet.*)

CURTAIN

ACT FOURTH

SCENE — *Simple drawing-room in the flat of Professor Bartlett.*)

(Curtain rises upon Agatha Bartlett looking expectantly toward the door of entrance, which the bell-boy has just opened to usher in Eroica Ardenza, who is in carriage dress.

AGATHA *(extending both hands to Eroica)*— You have seen and heard our darling child!

EROICA *(taking Agatha's hands)* — Yes, Agatha!

AGATHA — And she is — what they say — a musical genius?

EROICA — I feel that I have every reason to think so, Agatha, — and I am not alone in this, — I took with me experienced and trained judges.

AGATHA — My darling child!

EROICA — Yes, Agatha, your child is a genius of noble order. Not with the sort of precocity that goes up like a rocket in extreme youth, to come down a burnt stick in maturity, but a nobly endowed, though as yet, of course, only partly developed soul. She will compose great things some day, — things of the character that Richard Strauss is opening up vistas of. She has done some wonderful pieces of work already.

AGATHA — O Eroica! How happy I am! My life has not been wholly in vain!

EROICA — Why do you say this, Agatha?

AGATHA — O Eroica! you know what the passion of my life has always been, — to train the young — to guide their opening minds — to see their little faces glow with the apprehension of truth, — and I have been utterly prevented from living this passion of my being, — even with my own one little ewe lamb.

EROICA — Yes, Agatha, — I see. Your consecration to wifehood has prevented you on the one hand and little Eroica's affliction on the other.

AGATHA — Yes, Eroica. And I had thought that in becoming a wife I should be taking the most certain way to insure to myself life-work in the direction of this, my passion and special faculty.

EROICA — And when you found, as the years passed, that you had made a mistake in this, — was there no way to rectify it, Agatha?

AGATHA — You must try to realize that it took time to make this discovery, Eroica, and that custom, pecuniary conditions, Erskine's ideals, the habit of living together and depending upon each other in many ways, kept enmeshing me more and more, — until my passion, for want of exercise, became but the embers of the enthusiasm that first was mine.

EROICA (*tenderly*) — I see, Agatha! I see!

AGATHA — Your enthusiasm, Eroica, is as fresh today as ever it was.

EROICA — Yes, dear Agatha, and so would yours have been if you could have kept it alive by exercise, — as I have done mine.

AGATHA — Perhaps, Eroica! But (*sadly*) I can never revive it now. But my — our child, Eroica! How did she receive you?

EROICA (*with glowing countenance*) — She called me Musical Mamma. She said, “Let me see you,” meaning Let me put my fingers on your face. Oh, those exquisite fingers. I can feel them still. And she said, “Your face sings, Musical Mamma.” Then my tears fell on her fingers, and she said, “And these sing, too. Every thing sings to me, Musical Mamma. I do not need to have words put to singing. Things that sing have their meaning in themselves. Tones have in them more than words can say. I shall make a song for you one day, Musical Mamma, — a song without words, — in which your voice will tell all that the music could say. The tones of the violin, of the flute, of all instruments, tell all that the music would say without words. Think how much more the voice ought to do this — the voice of a living soul.”

AGATHA (*weeping gently*) — My little one! My little ewe lamb!

EROICA (*with fervor*)—Agatha, she shall lack nothing that the world can give to foster her genius.

AGATHA — Oh, what a poor mother I must always be to her by comparison with you!

EROICA — Agatha, you must not speak so! You brought her into life. You could not have done this, in the present social order, — except with great injustice to her, — without being a wife. All is well, Agatha dear! But you see how impossible it is for any one of us to be all in all to those we love. You with your perfect mother genius cannot suffice to your child as mother even. And so it is in all our relations. No one woman's love, be she ever so perfect a wife, can suffice to any man, — no one man's love, be he ever so perfect a husband, can suffice to any woman. The time will come when we will realize this and cease this poor struggling to be all things to our beloveds and to greedily demand of them to be all things to us.

AGATHA (*smiling through her tears*)—Speed the day, Eroica! But here comes Erskine! (*Professor Bartlett lets himself in with a latch-key. He goes to Agatha, puts his left arm about her, and extends the right hand to Eroica.*)

ERSKINE (*to Agatha*)—So you are mother to a genius, little woman, — as a reward for being

wife to me! That is some compensation, isn't it, sweet mother-heart?

AGATHA — I have needed no compensation for being wife to you, Erskine.

ERSKINE — Nevertheless, dear, you have been unable to live out yourself. You have nobly tried to help me in my child psychology, — but this was not your genius. You have had to crucify that! You have your child, our child, it is true, — but in a social order that did not cruelly demand of you to be a wife as well as a mother lest you bring a curse upon your child — you might have had both, — your child and your life. Ah, well! (*To Eroica.*) She hath done what she could (*smiling through filling eyes*).

EROICA (*with tears in her voice*) — Blessed art thou among women, Agatha! (*Then with a charmingly mischievous smile*) But tell me truly, Agatha dear, would you wish your little Eroica to be a wife?

AGATHA — O Eroica! How can I answer you? Not — not — if she must needs crucify her genius. No! no! — and yet — (*looking at Erskine with beseeching tender gaze*)

EROICA — Erskine, would you wish to see her marry?

ERSKINE (*with a smile of quiet humor*) — I would, Eroica, that the social order were evolved

to that stage wherein there should be no more marrying or giving in marriage.

EROICA — You answer me, Erskine, as the echo of my own soul. But now we must plan for the little Eroica. She must have the best masters the world affords at once. She must go to Europe, and some one must go with her to care for her, minister to her, lead her to and from her lessons (*looking steadily and sweetly at Agatha*).

AGATHA (*with eager eyes and quickening breath*)— Ah!

EROICA (*with tender raillery*)— You would not wish to take this care upon yourself, Agatha, it would interfere with your wifely duties.

AGATHA — O Erskine!

ERSKINE — It is settled, dear Agatha, that you are to go, *if you wish it*.

AGATHA (*torn in spirit*)— O Erskine, do you wish it?

ERSKINE (*with deep feeling*)— Should I love our child less than you do, Agatha?

AGATHA — Forgive me, Erskine! (*laying her head upon his shoulder and putting one arm about his neck*.)

ERSKINE — You are to have a small income of your own, Agatha, — settled upon you for life, — so that you can be quite independent of

your tyrannous husband (*with tender humor in his expression*).

AGATHA — O Eroica! How can we accept all this from you?

EROICA (*in gleeful tones*)—As the children accept things, Agatha, — as if they come from the universal and inexhaustible sources of life. And now I must leave you to make your plans. (*To Erskine*) Don't come down with me. (*To both*) I shall come again tomorrow. Au revoir. (*They watch her go out with faces beaming with love.*)

AGATHA — Erskine, it is Eroica who is your soul-mate and not I, dear. I have always known this, — but never so clearly as now. Erskine, dear, if I should *desert* you (*laughing softly*)— so that you could obtain a divorce, — could you and Eroica come together in the fullness of love?

ERSKINE — No, Agatha, Eroica and I could never *live* together, if *that* is what you mean. You must see that, dear! How could she live her life? How could I live mine?

AGATHA (*with deep seriousness*)— Erskine — you and Eroica should have a child (*Erskine's countenance glows*). You could not have this child without marriage, — but you could marry without living together. Eroica could marry you without losing her freedom because your ideas

are hers, — *if you were free from me*, Erskine!
And you shall be free some day, — and this not
that I love you less — but that I love you more.

ERSKINE (*putting his arms about her and
tenderly stroking her hair, while he gazes raptur-
ously into space*)— O Agatha! Agatha!

CURTAIN

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